

AMUSEMENTS:  
THEIR USES AND ABUSES.

*Testimony of Progressive Friends.*

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IN the *Pennsylvania Yearly Meeting of Progressive Friends*, at LONGWOOD, Chester Co., on the 20th of Fifth month, 1856, OLIVER JOHNSON, from the Committee on that subject, appointed two years previously, presented the following paper, which was adopted and directed to be published.

JOSEPH A. DUGDALE, }  
RUHANET WAT, } *Clerks.*  
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At an *Annual Meeting of Friends of Human Progress*, held in Waterloo, Seneca Co., N. Y., on the 1st, 2d and 8d of the Sixth month, 1856, a paper on Amusements, adopted by the late Pennsylvania Yearly Meeting of Progressive Friends, was read. After a free and careful consideration and discussion of the principles embraced in it, and the judicious discriminations and conditions with which, in the treatment of this interesting and important subject, it is so happily guarded, this meeting very fully accords its approval, and commends it to the attention of the friends of human progress and development in the good, the true, and the beautiful, both mental and physical, everywhere.

THOS. M'CLINTOCK, }  
MARY DOTT, } *Clerks*

## AMUSEMENTS.

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AMUSEMENTS are rarely spoken of in religious assemblies, except to be deprecated and denounced. The sects, with scarcely an exception, regard them with a suspicious and unfriendly eye, as beneath the dignity of man, at war with piety, and perilous to the soul. Against them preachers and elders lift up their warning voice, ecclesiastical convocations proclaim an undying hostility, Tract Societies utter their solemn dehortations, and religious periodicals swell the voice of rebuke and condemnation. The American Church, which can see no crime in selling the image of God in the shambles, and even finds in the New Testament a charter for bondage and a benediction for the slave-hunter, frowns upon the dance as an offence to Christianity and a sin against God !

Whence arises this hostility to amusements ? Is it founded in reason, or is it, like many other prevailing ideas and customs, the result of a misconception of the nature of man and of religion ? The question, whichever way it may be answered, is one of great practical importance, and deserves the serious attention of a Religious Society, organized avowedly on the principle of progress, professing allegiance to no creed or custom of the past, but to follow with reverent step the light of Truth, whithersoever it may lead the way. If amusements are sinful, tending to undermine the foundations of religion and good morals, the Progressive Friends should promptly unite with other religious bodies in discountenancing them. If, on the other hand, they are not only innocent in themselves, but conducive to man's happiness and normal development, we ought to encourage them among ourselves, and labor in all proper ways to avert from them the hostility of others.

That there is in human nature a fondness for amusements, a conscious want which nothing else can supply, will not, we think, be

denied. This want is manifested in our earliest infancy; it is imperious in its cravings during the period of youth,

"When, like a fountain sparkling from the earth,  
Bursts bubbling from the breast the melody of mirth;"

it is deeply felt when the labors, perplexities and disappointments of adult life severely task our powers; and, however sternly its pleadings may have been repressed or denied, it never quite dies out even in old age, or in the height of one's religiousness.\* On this point we may confidently appeal to universal experience and observation. What shall we say then? Shall we affirm that this want was implanted in us by our beneficent Creator to mock and tantalize us? Might we not as rationally conclude that the love of society, the thirst for knowledge, or any other natural desire, whether of the mind or the body, was designed, not to minister to our enjoyment through its gratification, but only to develop within us the power of self-denial? What impiety—nay, what infidelity—is involved in this impeachment of the Divine wisdom and goodness! When shall we comprehend the full significance of the truth, that we are the offspring of the living God, and created in his image and likeness? When shall we learn that his will concerning us is expressed in the nature he has given us; that every normal want of mind or body is an infallible revelation of a Divine law—a revelation transcending the authority of any creed, tradition or parchment, however sacred or venerable? In the practical concerns of life, how often is this only authoritative revelation set at naught! Institutions and customs are adjudged to be right or wrong, not in the light of this primary and fundamental test, but according to their conformity, or want of conformity, to the arbitrary maxims of a conventional morality, or to the dogmas and traditions of a benighted and degenerate Church. Taught in the school of a false theology to regard human nature as "carnal" and "depraved," we stifle her voice in the din and clatter of conflicting creeds, dishonoring our immortal birthright by unmanly subserviency to precepts and usages, begotten of ignorance and superstition and enforced by fear. With atheistic infatuation we avert our eyes from the light that streams into our minds and hearts from the Sun of Righteousness, and glows with a Divine effulgence in every part even of our physical organism, and, in the bewilderment that follows, we surrender ourselves to the guidance of a priesthood arrogant and presumptuous, and without illumination save from "sparks of their own kindling."

We assert with confidence that the prejudice which places amuse-

\* It is somewhere stated that even John Calvin was wont, after preaching on Sunday, to go out into a field near his house, and recreate himself by pitching quoits with some of his fellows.

ments in the list of things forbidden, has its root in the asceticism which disfigures the popular faith, and which, instead of giving scope for the normal activity of all the elements of human nature, puts one class of our faculties under sentence of outlawry, and teaches us to employ another class, no whit more Divine, in waging against them a fratricidal and exterminating war. In this unnatural, and therefore impious conflict, we disturb the healthful balance of our powers, and carry disorder and confusion into all the arrangements of society. The mind, thus violently restricted in one direction and cruelly perverted in another, becomes too often the prey of morbid sensibility and malign passion. Thus is life poisoned at the fountain—thus are all its sweetest juices turned into gall. Piety, which should be the redolence of a character developed into every manly excellence—a crown of joy, winning the heart of every wanderer from God's fold by its all-satisfying loveliness and beauty—blighted by asceticism, becomes a hideous spectre, grotesque, sepulchral and fantastic—its song an unnatural whine, its voice a menacing growl, appealing only to our fears.

The piety inculcated by Jesus is not, as many seem to suppose, a fanatical ecstasy over the mutilation or destruction of a part of our faculties, but the efflorescence of our *whole* nature, harmoniously developed, every faculty of mind, body and soul active according to its own special law, and contributing something to the flower, without which its form were less perfect, its hue less heavenly, its fragrance less Divine. It is not by "fasts and forms, and ostentatious self-impositions" and scourgings, that we can hope to win the favor of God, but by a cheerful obedience to the laws of our nature, by lives consecrated to purity and truth. To fit ourselves for heaven it is not necessary to make ourselves uncomfortable on earth; for "godliness hath the promise of this life as well as of that which is to come," giving us "a thousand fold" in the one, and "everlasting" joys in the other. Religion, rightly understood, does not contract, but enlarge our capacity for earthly enjoyment, imparting a more exquisite relish to every pleasure of mind and sense. It was not designed to make us sorrowful, melancholy and cadaverous, but round-faced, happy and joyful. A modern writer,\* as eminent for his piety as for his intellectual attainments, has illustrated this point with such striking clearness and beauty, that we cannot forbear to quote his words.

"To some, perhaps to many, religion and amusement seem mutually hostile, and he who pleads for the one may fall under suspicion

\* Channing—Works, Vol. II. p. 335.

of unfaithfulness to the other. But to fight against our nature is not to serve the cause of sound morals. God, who gave us our nature, who has constituted body and mind incapable of continued effort, who has implanted a strong desire for recreation after labor, who has made us for smiles much more than for tears, who has made laughter the most contagious of all sounds, whose Son hallowed a marriage-feast by his presence and sympathy, who has sent the child fresh from his creating hand to develop its nature by active sports, and who has endowed both young and old with a keen susceptibility of enjoyment from wit and humor—He, who thus formed us, cannot have intended us for a dull, monotonous life, and cannot frown on pleasures which solace our fatigue and refresh our spirits for coming toils. It is not only possible to reconcile amusement with duty, but to make it the means of more animated exertion, more faithful attachments, more grateful piety. True religion is at once authoritative and benign. It calls us to suffer, to die, rather than swerve a hair's-breadth from what God enjoins as right and good; but it teaches us that it is right and good, in ordinary circumstances, to unite relaxation with toil, to accept God's gifts with cheerfulness, and, to lighten the heart, in the intervals of exertion, by social pleasures."

The evils which result from placing the joyous elements of human nature under the ban of religion, and subjecting mankind to unnatural and artificial restraints, are so multifarious that a volume would scarcely suffice for their delineation. On the one hand, it takes from religion its softening and humanizing features, leading inevitably to bigotry, intolerance, and persecution; and on the other, by divorcing amusements from the legitimate and wholesome restraints of religion, it leads to mischievous abuses. If we have religion without amusements, we must also have amusements without religion, the one being the natural counterpart of the other; and it is difficult to say on which side the evils of this unnatural divorcement are most deeply felt. That asceticism, by proscribing social pleasures, exerts a hardening and dehumanizing influence is seen in the indisputable fact, that ascetics, in every age of the world, have been distinguished for an intolerant and persecuting spirit. The ancient Scribes and Pharisees were the first sect of ascetics (unless we except the Hindoos) of whom history gives us any distinct account. They frowned upon the innocent pastimes of the nation to which they belonged, and were exceedingly punctilious in ritual observances, fasts, and mortifications; but they devoured widows' houses, and conspired together with malignant hate to crucify the prophet of Nazareth and persecute his

faithful followers even unto death. The Inquisition, with all its inhuman paraphernalia of torture, whence came it? From men who accepted with thankfulness the natural bounties of Providence and found delight in social refinements and joys? No, but from those who taught that religion was at deadly feud with nature, and that amusements were heinous sins, a contrivance of the devil to lure souls to eternal perdition. And in more modern times it will be found that religious intolerance and persecution have marked the career of sects just in proportion as the spirit of asceticism has mingled with their faith. The most "gloomy-browed" sects exhibit least of the spirit of humanity, are always the most zealous in proscribing and vexing those whom they esteem as heretics, and the last to yield any thing to the spirit of progress. The gallows and the Fugitive Slave law find the most bitter and unscrupulous advocates among those who take the lead in placing the seal of condemnation upon "worldly amusements." The slave-hunt wakens hardly a throb of virtuous indignation in their bosoms; the spectacle of a mother returning manacled to the bondage which she dreads worse than death-starts in them no tear of sympathy, rouses them to no protest, no denunciation; but show them a company of men and maidens, or merry-voiced and rosy-cheeked children, moving joyously in the dance, and forthwith a scowl is on their brows and earnest dehortations leap from their tongues!

From a religion so revolting to their noblest instincts the young turn away in perplexity and disgust, and, in the absence of that healthful restraint which a purer faith would supply, they too often resort to amusements vicious in themselves, or that have been made so through unnecessary abuses. Parental influence, working constantly in the face of an imperious and unsatisfied natural want, soon loses its power over the conscience; and the child, finding home a place of irksome restrictions, seeks in the society of jovial and thoughtless persons, perhaps amidst the allurements of vice and dissipation, the social pleasures he so earnestly craves. It is in this way chiefly that the very name of amusements becomes a terror to serious and well-meaning but misguided parents, in almost every village and neighborhood. The young, on the one hand, are repelled from religion as a yoke irksome to be borne; on the other, parents and guardians shrink from social pleasures as from a pestilence, on account of abuses which themselves have caused; and thus the two classes, instead of being drawn to each other by mutual sympathy, reciprocal affection, and tender confidence, are sundered by constantly recurring debates and contentions. As parents are mainly responsible for these

lamentable results, so also is the remedy in their own hands. Let them no longer dishonor religion by setting it in impotent array against nature. Accepting as for ever settled the fact that God has implanted in the young a thirst for amusements, which cannot and ought not to be extinguished, let them make suitable provision for its indulgence under the paternal roof, amidst the sacred associations of home, and in the society of the pure, the refined, and the good. In the progress of this important work, they will no doubt encounter perplexities and difficulties that will seriously try their patience and awaken their deepest anxiety. A mistake so radical as that which we have endeavored to expose, and which has been fortified by centuries of false teaching, cannot be corrected in a day or a year, nor even in a generation. But let them not be discouraged, nor doubt for a moment the final result. Sooner or later they will reap the fruits of their perseverance in the sweet familiarity, the warm attachment, and the loving confidence of their children, and in the beautiful unfolding of their religious nature.

Having shown, we hope conclusively, that amusements, in some form, are natural and necessary, and that the prevailing hostility thereto arises from false ideas of the nature of man and of religion, we come next to consider the question, How shall we distinguish between amusements whose moral influence is good, and those which are of an opposite character; and what are the best safeguards against the abuses to which the former must ever be liable? The solution of this problem, we frankly confess, is not free from difficulties demanding conscientious care and wise discrimination. Of course it is not possible to set forth in statistical form, and in separate tables, both these classes of amusements. So much depends upon time, place, the state of society, and other circumstances, that we can only lay down certain fundamental principles, leaving them to be applied by individuals and communities, according to their own judgment, in view of their peculiar situation and wants.

In the first place, it is obvious that amusements ought always to be held subordinate to the great end of human existence—viz., the development of a pure, elevated, and noble CHARACTER. The dominant tone of our life should unquestionably be earnest, and even serious; but general seriousness is not incompatible with habitual cheerfulness, nor even with occasional periods of hilarity; without these, indeed, it is itself liable to be carried to excess. The mind was not ordained to be always in the same mood, nor the slave of any single faculty. Even the religious faculties may be, and often are, over-taxed and thereby impaired. The sense of duty and responsibility,



without which society would sink into moral chaos, may be too intensely stimulated and even ruinously overstrained. Nothing, indeed, is more liable to lead to insanity than a morbidly susceptible conscience. Still, there is need of caution on the other side, lest amusements should occupy too much of our time and attention, and thereby lead us to forget important duties. Says an able writer,\* "Amusement is not rightfully the business of any one's life. It should be no one's principal occupation. The moment it is made so it becomes perverted—it is abused. It should be regarded as the spice of life—not its staple food." There are multitudes who have fallen into this error, whose principal object, apparently, is to "kill time." Life to them is consecrated by no great and noble purpose, no lofty aim. Empty-headed and frivolous idlers! they long for new excitement as a spoiled child pines for confectionery. It were more charitable to furnish this class with *work* than with amusements. These are they whom Paul so graphically describes—"lovers of pleasure *more* than lovers of God." Solomon, in that remarkable passage, so often quoted by the clergy, and which, no doubt, has been the text for thousands of ascetic sermons, has indicated the point beyond which amusements should never be carried—viz., the point where they are liable to make us forget our moral accountability. How striking are his words! "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes." And having thus recognized the truth that amusements are natural and proper for the young, he adds the timely caution—"But know thou that for all these things" [as for every thing else] "God will bring thee into judgment." In other words, "Do not forget in your hours of mirth that you are responsible beings, and that life should be devoted to a great purpose." To interpret these words as a menace and a sarcasm is to do violence to their obvious meaning and spirit.

We observe, in the next place, that any form of amusement, the obvious tendency of which, even in the smallest degree, is to diminish the power of conscience, to corrupt the moral feelings, to inflame and bewilder the imagination, to becloud the reason, to free the passions from wholesome restraint, to diminish the reverence for justice and truth, to excite a spirit of cruelty or revenge, to promote or foster the taste for intoxicating drinks, or for tobacco in any of its forms, or to make us indifferent to the obligations and claims of our common humanity, ought not only to be scrupulously avoided, but earnestly opposed. "Any amusement," says the writer† whom we just

\* Adin Ballou. *Christian Socialism*, p. 831.

† Adin Ballou.

quoted, "from the enjoyment of which we cannot conscientiously retire with the conviction that, on the whole, it has done us good, ought to be immediately eschewed. If it promote innocent mirth and cheerfulness, or otherwise conduce to the improved health of the physical and intellectual powers, without injuring the moral character, it is an innocent and commendable amusement. If it have the contrary effect, it is at best more or less a pernicious one, however fashionable, specious, or captivating."

It is implied in what we have already said, that amusements should be strictly conformed to the laws of health; and yet the point is one of so much importance as to deserve a distinct and emphatic mention. When they are of such a kind as to lead inevitably to imprudence in dress, or so arranged as to infringe upon the time allotted to sleep, or when they require us to remain for hours in overcrowded and ill-ventilated rooms, they do us a serious injury. On this branch of the subject we are constrained to speak in tones of earnest remonstrance and impressive warning. Great numbers sacrifice health and even life to the ignorance or carelessness which leads them to disregard the laws of their physical organism in the pursuit of pleasure.

The best safeguard, probably, against any or all the abuses to which amusements are liable, would be such an arrangement as should bring together for their enjoyment persons of both sexes and of every age, from the gray-haired grandsire to the prattling child, not, except on rare occasions, in great crowds, and in public places, but around the family hearth, in circles embracing our kindred, and our immediate neighbors and friends. The author of an excellent work on amusements\*—the only one on that subject that we have been able to find—well observes: "The natural and only safe mode of enjoying amusements is in common. Where one sex, or any one particular class, enjoy their amusements alone, they are sure to run into excess.....The division of the human family into man, woman and child, father, mother, brother and sister, is the only conservative principle of society; they act and re-act upon each other like the different seasons upon the earth. Each age and each sex has its peculiar characteristics, that serve to modify and check certain mischievous tendencies in the other sex and in others of different ages. ....For one sex to attempt to amuse themselves agreeably and innocently alone, is like trying to make music on a one-stringed instrument; it has about it a sameness that is tedious and annoying.....The union of the aged with the young, the fair with the manly, in our diversions, brings every source of social improvement and enjoy-

\* *Plea for Amusements*, by Frederic W. Sawyer. New York: Appleton & Co., 1847.

ment together—age with its gravity and experience, mid-life with its energy and its cares, and youth with its vivacity and its hopes.... Is it right for the aged to censure and discourage the innocent amusements of the young, merely because they fear that they may be carried to excess, when, by presiding at those diversions, they can effectually prevent it?"

In the light of the principles now stated, let us consider briefly three special forms or sources of amusement, the general prevalence of which forces them upon our attention, and which, in view of their importance and the diversity of opinion that they have caused, we could not avoid without imputations upon our frankness if not upon our courage.

1. *Music*.—The Quakers, we believe, are the only class among us who deny or doubt that the capacity for making music, and the susceptibility to enjoyment through it, is the gift of God to man, not to be despised and stifled, but gratefully accepted and cultivated. The early Friends found music so intermixed with the superstitious formalities of a corrupt Church, and so perverted by frivolity and passion, that they mistook it for an evil; and the Quakers of the present day are hugging with blind pertinacity the mistake of their fathers. Would to God that they clung with equal tenacity to the great radical truths enunciated by the founders of their Society!

We have never read or listened to any thing in the form of an argument against music that would not have been equally good if urged against literature, eloquence, conversation, or even speech itself, all which are constantly and hourly employed in the service of falsehood, oppression, and crime. Is eloquence a sin, because it is often used to excite prejudice or rouse malignant passion? Shall the preacher cease to lift up his voice in behalf of virtue and truth, because the politician and the warrior use the same Divine faculty to serve their ends? Are speech and conversation to be proscribed and the human family condemned to perpetual taciturnity, because multitudes make their tongues the vehicles of slander and defamation? No more is music to be ranked among things forbidden, merely because it is perverted by the thoughtless reveller, or made to do service on the field of battle.

Music is the delight of children. It soothes them in moments of fretfulness and passion, it diverts them in hours of suffering and pain. Even Quaker mothers know by experience the magic potency of the cradle-song. In after life it has great power over man's emotional nature. Every feeling of joy or grief may be poured forth in song. Every noble sentiment or emotion that swells the

human breast finds a natural outlet in musical tones. There is no more inspiring stimulus for man's highest faculties, nothing better adapted to raise him above all that is low and grovelling than the delights of music, especially when they mingle with or flow through the charmed language of poetry. If any one doubts that music may be made a means of elevating human nature, let him observe the effect of a song, set to fitting words, upon the inmates of a prison. Let him note the evidences of sorrow for weakness and sin, the kindling of hope in place of despair, the resuscitation of long-buried associations of home and kindred, and the exhibitions of gentleness instead of passion, that may thus be produced, and surely he will doubt no more. "I am no musician," says Channing, "and want a good ear, and yet I am conscious of a power in music which I want words to describe. It touches chords, reaches depths in the soul, which lie beyond all other influences, extends my consciousness, and sometimes gives me a pleasure which I have found in nothing else."

We do not hesitate to advise parents to cultivate in their children the faculty of music. It is the gift of a beneficent Creator, and, like the faculty of speech, it should be trained and developed, not alone for purposes of amusement, but as a potent instrumentality in the work of human progress and elevation. It should minister joy at every fireside, it should solace us in affliction, it should comfort us in sickness, it should cement our friendships, and lighten our daily toils. If there is on earth any scene that can give us a foretaste of heavenly bliss, it is that of a household whose refined sympathies, affluent affections, and world-embracing love, find daily expression in melodious song!

2. *Dancing*.—The prejudice against this form of amusement, in the minds of serious persons, is exceedingly strong, having been fostered by abuses of long standing, which must be admitted to be exceedingly pernicious in their effects. But we must discriminate between the amusement itself and those abuses which do not necessarily grow out of it. The most inveterate opponents of dancing at the present day are found among those most strict in their veneration for the authority of the Scriptures. They believe that the Jews received their social, political, and religious institutions through the direct inspiration of God, and not a few of them profess to find in the system of Jewish servitude a Divine warrant for the chattel slavery of the present day. How, then, can they reconcile their hostility to dancing with the admitted fact, that the custom was intermingled not only with the social habits, but even the religious rites of the Jews, "the peculiar people of God?" The escape of the

Israelites from Egyptian bondage, how was it celebrated? By fasting and prayer? Nay, but by festive rejoicing and boundless exultation; Miriam, the prophetess, and sister of Aaron, leading out "all the women," who followed her "with timbrels and with dances." Solomon tells us, with whatever of inspiration belonged to him, that "there is a time to dance;" the Hebrew Psalmist, whose words thrill the devotions of all Christendom, exhorts us to "praise God in the dance;" and even Jesus, in the deeply affecting parable of the Prodigal Son, finds an illustration of the joy that reigns in heaven, when an erring soul returns from its wanderings, in the "music and dancing," and "merry-making" with which the prodigal was welcomed by his family and kindred.

Nearly twenty years ago, that truly enlightened and morally brave man, WILLIAM ELLERY CHANNING, in considering the means best adapted to diminish the temptations to intemperance, spoke with earnest eloquence of the importance of furnishing the people with "the means of innocent pleasure;" and prominent among the pleasures which he regarded as innocent was dancing. The views which he expressed are at once so just, discriminating and wise, that we cannot forbear to quote his words.

"Dancing is an amusement which has been discouraged in our country by many of the best people, and not without reason. Dancing is associated in their minds with balls; and this is one of the worst forms of social pleasure. The time consumed in preparation for a ball, the waste of thought upon it, the extravagance of dress, the late hours, the exhaustion of strength, the exposure of health, and the languor of the succeeding day—these, and other evils, connected with this amusement, are strong reasons for banishing it from the community. But dancing ought not, therefore, to be proscribed. On the contrary, balls should be discouraged—for this, among other reasons, that dancing, instead of being a rare pleasure, requiring elaborate preparation, may become an every-day amusement, and may mix with our common intercourse. This exercise is among the most healthful. The body as well as the mind feels its gladdening influence. No amusement seems more to have a foundation in our nature.....It is to be desired, that dancing should become too common among us to be made the object of special preparation as in the ball; that members of the same family, when confined by unfavorable weather, should recur to it for exercise and exhilaration; that branches of the same family should enliven in this way their occasional meetings; that it should fill up an hour in all

the assemblages for relaxation in which the young form a part.”\*

3. *The Drama*.—Of this form of amusement it becomes us to speak with greater reserve, inasmuch as many, perhaps a majority, of our number have had but a very limited opportunity to investigate the facts and weigh the principles in the light of which alone a sound judgment can be formed. Many of us have heretofore shared, in a greater or less degree, the sentiment which has long prevailed among serious-minded persons of almost every class, that the theatre was hopelessly identified with various immoralities; while others, having given the subject a somewhat careful consideration, are of the opinion that it not only ought to be, but may be reformed, and made the ally of virtue and religion. We know that in France and Spain the theatre had its origin in exhibitions intended to impress upon the people the great facts of religious history, and the leading doctrines of Christianity, as anciently understood; but like Christianity itself, it was soon perverted. Conceding that, as hitherto conducted, its influence has been, in many respects, exceedingly pernicious, many enlightened persons yet believe that, as the taste for dramatic representation is deeply imbedded in human nature, the effort to destroy the institution must necessarily fail, while the same energy and zeal, if directed to the reform of those abuses which have given it so bad a name, would be attended with marked success. They affirm that, in some places, this reform has actually begun; that many theatres have ceased to offer facilities for intemperance and licentiousness; that the plays now most frequently on the stage are far less objectionable than those of former years, and that managers are showing a disposition to cater to the tastes and convictions of the refined and the good. As proof of this they point to the fact, that dramas intended to depict the evils of intemperance, and win men to habits of industry and sobriety, or to set in striking array the deformities and crimes of slavery in contrast with the beauties of freedom, have been represented in some theatres with the happiest moral results. “*Uncle Tom’s Cabin*,” they tell us, has been played for weeks and months together, in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington, drawing immense crowds, and thus presenting anti-slavery truth, in the most impressive manner, to thousands who were not likely to hear it in any other place. It is alleged by intelligent persons that the spirit of mobocracy in New York and Philadelphia was sensibly checked by this means, and the tone of public sentiment greatly changed for the better. If this is so, it certainly affords reasonable ground for doubt whether it is

wise to wage an indiscriminate war upon the theatre. The whole subject should be candidly and carefully considered in the light of the principles above laid down. Opinions, upon a matter of so much consequence, should be cautiously formed, and based, not upon prejudice, but upon the clearest deductions of fact and philosophy. We must be careful, on the one hand, to give no countenance to immorality, and, on the other, not to confound an institution that may perchance be right in itself, with the incidental abuses which have grown up around it. On one point we are fully agreed, viz.: That theatres generally, as now conducted, ought not to receive the support of the friends of morality.

Besides the three forms of amusement already considered, there are others, of no small importance, of which we should be glad to speak, but the limits of this paper forbid. For the most part, however, they are of such a character that they stand in far less need of discussion, at this time, than those upon which we have dwelt; and besides, our object is rather to unfold the PRINCIPLES which should guide us in the choice of our amusements, and to indicate the SPIRIT which should, under all circumstances, pervade them, than to enter upon details, which, however interesting, may safely be referred to the judgment of individuals and communities, when once those principles are understood. We might speak of *Holidays*—the Fourth of July, New Year's Day, Harvest Home, Christmas, etc.—their uses and the proper mode of their observance; of Pic-Nics, to promote temperance, anti-slavery, or some other philanthropic or social object—now so common among us, and which, on the whole, have been found to be exceedingly pleasant and useful; and of those more private gatherings, where relatives or friends come together—it may be upon the birth-day of some dearly loved boy or maiden, the anniversary of a wedding, fragrant with holiest reminiscences, or of some other thrilling event of domestic life—to strengthen those ties of kindred, family, home and neighborhood, which are not only the sources of our purest earthly joy, but the Divinely conservative power of human society. We might speak, too, of intellectual culture, which, in whatever field of science, literature or art, it may be pursued, opens at every step sources of amusement at once elevated, refined, and inexhaustible. We might rejoice in the multiplication of lyceums, which offer a healthful stimulus not only to the intellect but to the social feelings; and also in the institution of libraries in our villages and neighborhoods, by means of which good books are made accessible to all classes, the mists of ignorance and prejudice dispelled, and society redeemed from the blighting influence of gossip, tale-bearing

and detraction, and bound together by ties of amity, affection, and good-fellowship. These are fruitful and inviting themes, but these brief allusions must suffice.

We have now uttered our convictions frankly, earnestly, sincerely. That they are altogether free from error or mistake it would not become us to affirm; but we may say that truth has been our object, the highest welfare of humanity our end and aim. God forbid that, in our anxiety to sever the unnatural connection between religion and asceticism, we should even seem, for a moment, to offer a license to sensual pleasure, unseemly levity, scoffing irreverence, or untimely mirth. In our efforts to deliver mankind from the indurating power of superstition and fanaticism, we would not make them triflers, forgetful of their immortal destiny, unmindful that they were

——— "made of Angel form, erect,  
To hold communion with the heavens above."

Such a result indeed would overwhelm us with sorrow and alarm. If we believed that such a calamity would follow this plea for amusements, nothing could tempt us to set thereto our hand and seal. No, no—it is not to make men less religious, less reverential, less devoted, in the legitimate sense of those terms, that we claim for social pleasures the place in our daily life which a beneficent Creator evidently intended that they should fill. On the contrary, we would augment the power of piety by associating it with all that is bright, animating, hopeful and joyous, thus making it lovely and attractive in all eyes; while we would insure the greatest possible amount of happiness from amusements, and guard them against all abuses by tempering them with the chastening and purifying influences of religion. Animated by this spirit, we submit to the world these, our cherished convictions, confident that they will commend themselves to the enlightened judgment of many earnest advocates of truth and progress, and hoping that they may exert some humble influence in promoting a much needed reform.